

Sustaining Human Societies and the Environment: New Zealand

STEP
SECOND-YEAR TRANSFORMATIONAL
EXPERIENCE PROGRAM



How did this experience impact you personally?

Before the trip I was honestly hesitant to go because I had never travelled without a close friend or family member before. It wasn't that I was afraid of navigating the country by myself, but that I was afraid of experiencing so many amazing things by myself, since one of my favorite things in life is the ability to share it with other people. I ended up solving this problem by being open with the other students in my program and getting to know them. In addition, I kept a journal while I was on the trip. This is a more individual way I was able to document my feelings, thoughts, and experiences in a way that's so genuine I can reread it and it's like I'm back in New Zealand again. Lastly, I took a ton of photographs. I have a pretty awful memory and I really enjoy the art of photography, so this was a fun way to capture moments, people, and sights from the trip too. One of my photos is my phone wallpaper so I see New Zealand every day!



Provide a description of your STEP project.

In May of 2017 I traveled to New Zealand with 15 other Ohio State students. We toured the South Island with an Ohio State professor and TA, as well as a New Zealand native tour guide and bus driver. The program focused on learning about how tourism is a huge portion of New Zealand's economy and how that has beneficial and detrimental effects on the environment. We looked at everything from New Zealand's natural features, to the native Maori culture, to thrill seeking experiences that people from all over the world come to the South Island to see and do. Some of the places we went and things we did included: a nature tour to see wild seals, sea lions, and penguins; a cruise out on Milford Sound; zip lining; a 10-mile hike in Fiordland National Park; swimming with dolphins; a Maori cultural tour; visited a New Zealand dairy farm; hiked up to Fox Glacier; and visited a sheep farm. In addition to experiencing these attractions first hand, we talked to the people who work at each company to see how they use their business to benefit the environment, since for most of them the environment is necessary to sustain their business. We also learned a lot about New Zealand's origins and indigenous people, its use of renewable energy sources, its native flora and fauna, and its history of earthquakes.

How did your experience impact your academic, personal, and life goals moving forward?

- My personal and career goals have definitely been changed to incorporate more sustainable and green practices. Whether that's in my home by using renewable energy such as buying an electric car or installing solar panels, or in my career by making the food industry more efficient to get more product out of less raw materials.
- I would also like to develop products that require the destruction and removal of invasive species, much like how possums have been controlled in New Zealand.
- An academic goal that has been a result of this trip is picking up a second minor: Society and Environmental Issues.



What did you learn?

- New Zealand is a very amplified case study to look at sustainability. Because it is an island, they are isolated and have a limited amount of land and resources. I learned to be more conscious of how much energy I use, food I waste, and trash I produce.
- I learned a lot about how big of an impact invasive species can be for a small and isolated island like New Zealand. So many unique animals are found only in New Zealand, and they aren't evolved to live with normal predators from other lands. I found it fascinating that the possum population has been controlled by making possum fur useful in the economy.
- I appreciated the value of differing perspectives on this trip. I enjoyed noticing the small and large cultural differences between the Midwestern US, New Zealand, and even other tourists from other countries. It really played an important role in how we individually interpreted many of the things we all experienced.

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What was your favorite part of your experience?

My favorite part of my experience was the natural beauty of New Zealand and in the world in general. Living my whole life in the Midwest mountains and ocean always render me awestruck. Being able to see such a different environment than I'm used to was amazing. I struggled to put my camera down in order to actually experience New Zealand in its pure form. It was one of those trips that feels like a dream once you return home.

The most beautiful day on the trip was the day we drove through Fiordland National Park to get the Milford Sound and then later walked by Lake Te Anau at sunset and saw the stars from the roof of the Glowworm Cave Tour boat.



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